



Windows into Illustration: Mini Grey

Article Author:

[Mini Grey](#) [1]

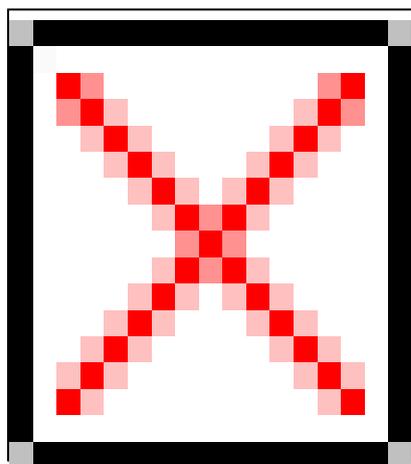
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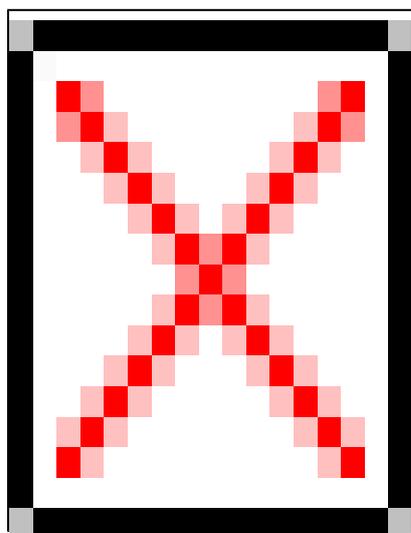
Windows into Illustration

Byline:

Mini Grey on her book **The Bad Bunnies' Magic Show**



Mini Grey is an award-winning writer and illustrator, well known for books such as [Traction Man](#) [3], [Toys in Space](#) [4] and **Kate Greenaway Medal** winner [The Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon](#) [5]. She is a judge for this year's [Klaus Flugge Prize](#) [6]. Her books are characterised by their invention, humour and sense of play. Here she describes her approach to creating [The Bad Bunnies? Magic Show](#) [7].



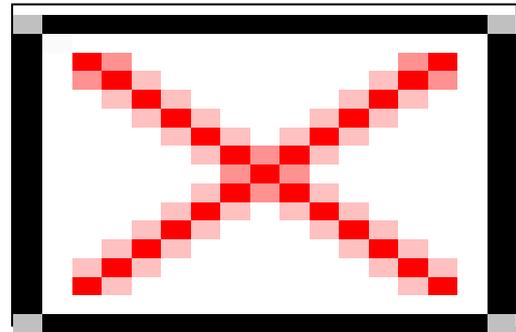
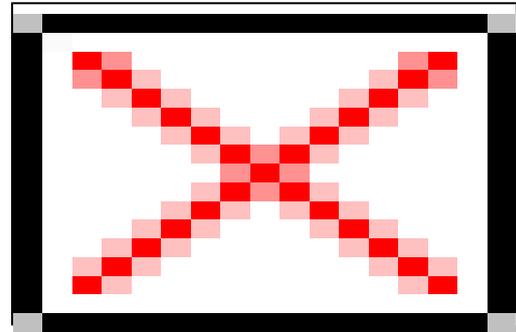
Every reading of a picture book is like putting on a new performance. When I made **The Bad Bunnies? Magic Show** I wanted to make a book that was like a theatrical entertainment, and I wanted the reader to be the audience.

In the story the bad bunnies, Abra and Cadabra, have padlocked their magician the Great Hypno in one of his own trunks. Then they put on their own rather haphazard magic show, culminating in a dastardly scheme to hypnotise the

audience and steal their valuables.

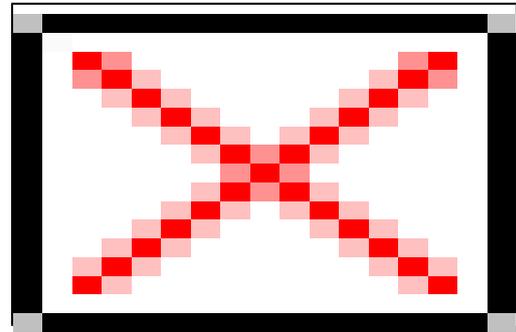
At first I wanted the bunnies' magic tricks to be proper pop-up paper-engineering, because playing around with pop-ups is such a lot of fun. But I realised this would make the book impossibly expensive for a publisher to produce.

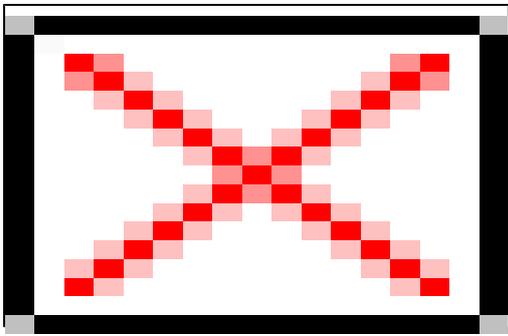
So as often happens, I found that less is more, and just cutting into the page edge with a magical sort of shape could be all the magic I needed. When you turn the page you make the magic happen. As in real magic, it's your imagination that is really doing the trick. Here are Abra and Cadabra performing the Birdcage Transformation.



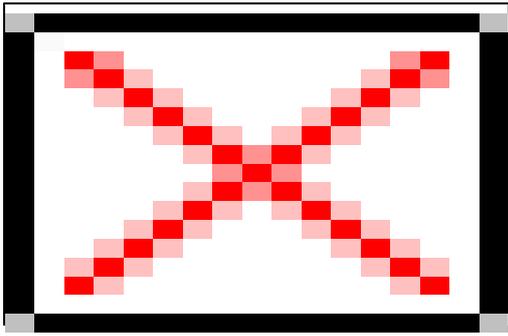
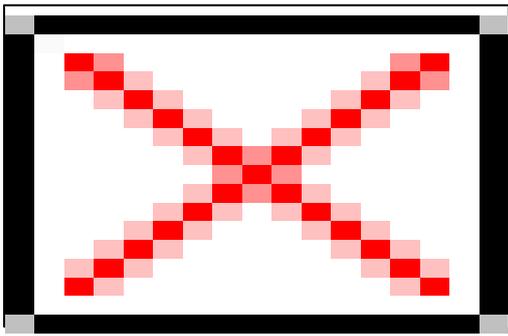
The page I want to tell you about is the one where the Lovely Brenda is sawn in half in front of your eyes. I'd tried various ways of pulling the two halves of Brenda apart but they were too complicated, I had to do it with the turning of just one piece of paper.

I worked out that with a puff of smoke that was a flap it should be possible. Jane Buckley and Lara Hancock at Simon&Schuster were incredibly helpful. We had to do several test-prints and fiddlings around to get a reliable working flap. With pop-up, as with magic ? distraction is everything, and if you get your audience's attention where you want it, they won't see a glaring glitch in front of their eyes.



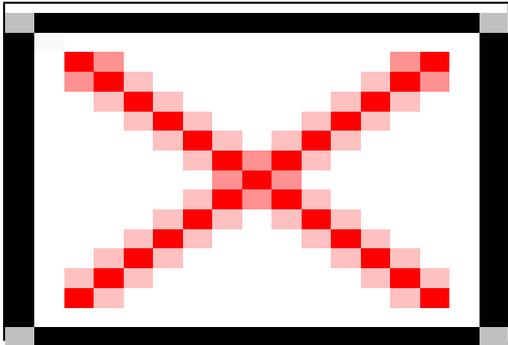


I made the pieces but then when I watched it happen I realised I needed more focus on where I wanted the reader to look ? at Brenda?s face ? not at the crease where the flap was ? so I added a pop of yellow ? hypnotic lines round Brenda?s head before, and a yellow explosion after - making you look at where Brenda?s been sawn.

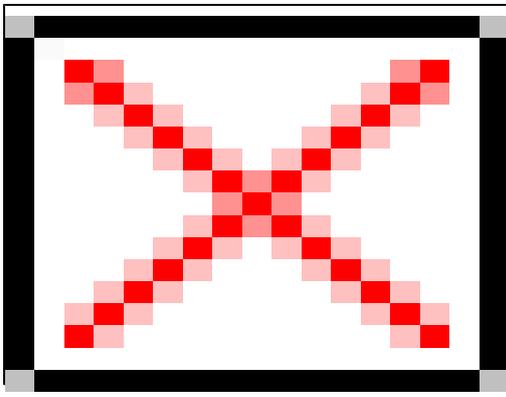


Just getting a flap to be shut when the page opens is trickier than you might think.

Nearly every spread in the Bad Bunnies? Magic Show happens onstage. To work out the picture space I made a quick cardboard Bunny Theatre so I definitely knew what was where backstage.



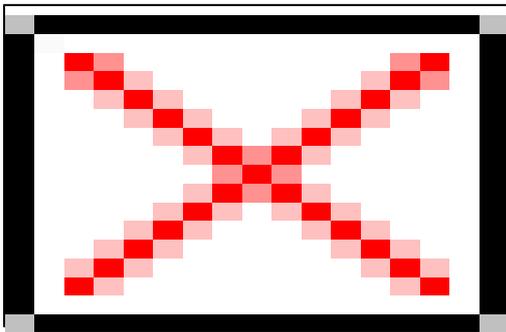
Theatres are very multi-layered. I absolutely love the Pollocks Toy Theatres where you can build up layers of scenery like a fabulous peepshow. To make my pictures, first I?d have to work out what on earth was going on in each scene, and tracing paper was brilliant for working out all my props and scenery and moving characters about.



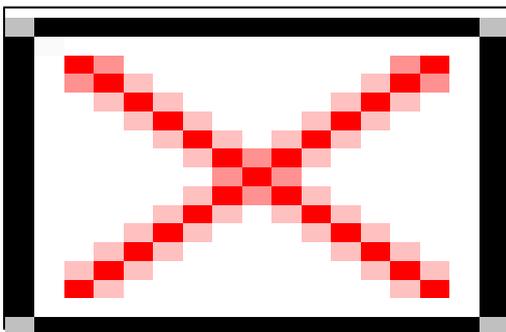
Then I would draw and paint my different layers separately: the back wall, boxes and cabinets, unleashed creatures like octopuses and tigers, the curtain, the bunnies and their props, ? and then sometimes the front curtains and even the audience too. Then I'd scan all these layers and put them all together floating on top of each other in Photoshop. I tried to keep the colours quite minimal so the drawing was doing most of the work ? mostly just black, white, aqua and splashes of red.

Of course, when Brenda gets sawn in half there is no blood. She?s a magician?s assistant, she knows how to do these things. Her sawn up box-middle is empty. Don?t ask me how. The amazing thing about picture books is we can all accept the most impossible of happenings in them.

I did quite a lot of research into how magic really happens, and I did find out a few ways of sawing ladies in half. Of course I can?t give away any secrets, but with magic the answer to how it?s done is often either wildly more complicated or simple than you?d ever imagine.



After the sawing, the two halves of Brenda go wandering about and eventually the top half manages to free the Great Hypno. I made sure I showed Brenda fitting herself back together again, so the reader is sure that no Brendas were hurt in the making of this book.



[The Bad Bunnies Magic Show](#) [7] is published by Simon and Schuster, 978-1471157608, £6.99 pbk.

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